

Subject: Important legal brief - UCC stands up for equal marriage in North Carolina

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To: michaelstroud@bellsouth.net;

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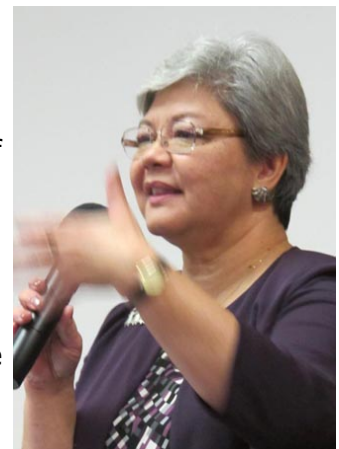


Important Legal Brief Standing up for Equal Marriage in North Carolina a letter from June Boutwell

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This morning the United Church of Christ (as authorized by the United Church of Christ Board acting as General Synod ad interim) filed suit in the US District Court in Charlotte, North Carolina, alleging that the North Carolina constitution and other marriage laws of the state limit ministers' choices thereby restricting the freedom of religious expression guaranteed in the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

Under state laws consistent with Amendment One, it is a Class 1 misdemeanor for a minister to perform a marriage ceremony for a couple that hasn't obtained a license, and such a license may not be issued to same-gender couples. A Class 1 misdemeanor is punishable by up to 120 days in jail and/or probation and community service. In addition, the laws allow anyone to sue the minister who performs a marriage ceremony without a license and collect up to \$200 if they prevail. The UCC believes that this prohibition and penalties also apply to a minister performing a religious ceremony not intended to result in a legal marriage.



Restrictive marriage laws across the country have been challenged in many courts on the basis of the 14th Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection." This is believed to be the first challenge to restrictive marriage laws based on the First Amendment.

The United Church of Christ maintains its commitment to being a united and uniting church. We recognize that our local churches and clergy deserve the full First Amendment Rights of "free exercise of religion." This lawsuit is being filed to protect our right to religious liberty, regardless of where one is on their own faith journey as it relates to marriage equality and the rights of LGBT persons. These laws prohibit not only the religious unions of same-gender loving couples, but also the blessing of unions of any two people who choose not to legally marry for any number of reasons.

While the United Church of Christ is the only denominational plaintiff, General Synod of the United Church of Christ v. Cooper also includes a number of clergy and couples from other faith traditions. Also named in the suit as plaintiffs are three UCC clergy and three couples who are members of their respective UCC local churches.

It is possible that this action will be reported in the national news media, and I want you to be informed of that possibility in advance. **We humbly ask that if you are contacted by the media about this case, to please forward ALL inquiries to the United Church of Christ's Director of Communications, Ms. Ann Poston, at (216) 736-2173 or postona@ucc.org.** Additionally, if any media arrives unannounced to your congregation, please prepare your staff to share this contact information with them. You can politely decline participation in an interview and ask that all responses be funneled through this media call center.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at by email (jboutwell@secucc.org) or cell phone (404-615-2492). For more information, please consult <http://ucc.org/ido>. We ask that you keep the denomination in your prayers as we take this bold stand for the protection of everyone's religious freedom.

With hope for liberty and justice (both biblical concepts!) for all!

June Boutwell, Designated Conference Minister

Other Resources

[A PDF copy of this letter can be downloaded by clicking here](#)

[A letter to congregations in the UCC explaining this legal case can be downloaded here](#)

[A prayer to use in worship can be found here](#)



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Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ